

**Testimony before the Joint Committee on Higher Education and Employment
Advancement
SB 750 An Act Concerning the prevention and treatment of mental illness at
institutions of higher education.
February 14, 2019
David S Woodworth**

Good afternoon (evening) Senator Haskell, Rep. Haddad and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is David Woodworth and I am a registered voter in Winsted.

I am here to testify regarding SB 750, An Act Concerning the prevention and treatment of mental illness at institutions of higher education.

I graduated from OWTS in Torrington in 2000 and upon graduation, took 2 semesters at NCCC and one summer course at UConn – Torrington Branch before transferring to WIT in Boston where I earned a Bachelors Degree in 2004. I have since returned to NCCC where I am currently a Part-time student working toward an Associate's Degree in Human Services and hope to transfer into a BSW and/or a DARC program in CT.

I did experience serious depression, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse issues beginning in 2003, and sought individual counseling at Wentworth on a weekly basis, which I found helpful. Mental health services are seriously lacking at NCCC where I am now.

Two ideas worth exploring would be first hiring Recovery Support/Peer Support Specialists for peer-led group interventions, one-to-one peer support, and peer-run services. Existing studies in addition to my personal life prove that peers with authentic recovery experience sharing their strength and hope improve outcomes. In fact, I think further research would reveal that peer support improves grades and attendance, increases graduation rates, and reduces dropout rates.

Ideally, depending on school size, at least 4 Peer Support Specialists would be made available: 2 female and 2 male, with one of each with specific lived experience of recovery with mental health or substance abuse issues. Further support for HB 5053 would identify this as an important milestone to increase employment opportunities for people in recovery from substance abuse.

Secondly, each school would make two counselors available, one Full time and one Part time. Ideally one female and one male counselor would be most beneficial. Perhaps one would have on-campus office hours and one would be available off-site on a contract basis with the school for commuting students or during semester breaks.

Lastly, sharing local mental health and substance abuse services during New Student orientations would go a long way toward offering help until additional resources are

available on campus. My friends and peers in recovery are generally apprehensive to ask for help in the first place, so starting the conversation early on and acknowledging the problems do exist would invite struggling students and perhaps their families to seek positive solutions and address the stigma surrounding seeking help many of us, including myself, grew up with.